

Testimony re Senate Bill 1075
Senate Education Committee
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My name is Jake Clark., I'd like to thank the Senate Education Committee for their efforts in moving this bill forward and all their dedication to the betterment of the state of Michigan.

I am writing in support of this bill as a student at Michigan State University College of Law, a participant in the Talsky Center for Human Rights and, most importantly, as a concerned citizen educated in Michigan public schools. This bill seeks to increase Michigan students' knowledge of genocide and raise awareness of genocide through such education so that Michigan students will be prepared to lead discussion and advocate against genocide in the future.

My experience as a member of the Jewish faith and as a graduate of the Michigan public school system drove me to write in support of this bill. When I was young, my grandmother would tell me stories of our family's struggles to lay down roots in the United States. In the early 1900s, my great grandparents emigrated from Poland to escape the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe. Upon entry into the United States, they encountered anti-Semitic attitudes and felt it necessary to conceal any indication of our family's Judaism by changing our last name. It may have reduced the amount of vitriol our family encountered in the U.S., but did not diminish their commitment to the Jewish faith. They were lucky to escape and went on to live very successful lives. However, I cannot say the same for my extended family that could not make the trip. My grandmother rarely speaks of my great grandparents' struggles as Jewish immigrants, but even more rarely does she speak of our family members left behind in Poland. Whenever she does, it is with a tone that implies the fate most Jews in Poland were met with in the 1930s and 40s.

In addition, many of my friend's grandparents were Holocaust survivors. The images of the numbers tattooed on their wrist is forever burned into my brain, and is a constant reminder of the atrocities committed against the Jews, handicapped, and other vulnerable classes. These experiences gave me my foundational education in the Holocaust and genocide, and made me aware that the indifference of the German people and the international community leading up to the war was an enormous factor in the perpetration of genocide during World War II.

I am a proud graduate of Lahser High School in Bloomfield Hills, MI. When I attended, the student population had roughly 1,000 students, including about six Jewish students. In my grade, many of my classmates had never met a Jew before. Needless to say, I encountered much anti-Semitism while in school. During my

sophomore year U.S. History class, our teacher taught a unit on World War II. As part of the curriculum, our teacher wanted to give us a lesson on the Holocaust by showing the film "Schindler's List." Although a wonderful and relatively accurate film, it is not a suitable substitute for actual Holocaust and genocide education. Our teacher simply had no other resources to create an adequate curriculum on the Holocaust and genocide. The problem of lack of genocide and Holocaust education within Michigan public schools was highlighted while we watched the film. During the film, many students looked confused as to why Jews were treated the way they were in Europe. Students would raise their hands and ask questions like, "Why are the Jews crying on the way to the bathroom? They are just taking a shower..." and "Why didn't more people like Schindler try to help the Jews?" They were asking these questions not to be funny, but rather because they genuinely did not understand, or even know of, the depravity of the acts perpetrated during the Holocaust.

Lahser was one of the best public schools in the state, yet many of its students lacked fundamental knowledge concerning World War II, the Holocaust, and genocide.

The key to eradicating genocide is to ensure that our future generations have a fundamental understanding of genocide, as well as the ability to recognize when genocide is occurring and advocate against it. Senate Bill 1075 is a step towards that goal, and a step towards making Michigan a national leader in genocide and Holocaust awareness.

Thank you again